From:	Ehud Barak <ehbarak1@gmail.com>
To:	Idan Ofer <Idano@quantum-pacific.com>
CC:	
Date:	Tue, 7/28/2015 3:46:35 AM
Subject:	Re: Ian Bremmer report

Hi Idan
Thx for sending it to me.
Ian is by far one of the BEST.
Best
EB

Sent from my iPhone

> On Jul 27, 2015, at 21:37, Idan Ofer wrote:
>
> Hope you like what this brilliant political commentator writes.
>
>
> turkey now fighting just about everybody in iraq and syria. the latest on the iran deal – it's complicated. good news coming out of afghanistan. and, because everybody's been asking, a few thoughts on the (very early stages of the) us presidential elections.
>
> turkey
>
> turkey has gotten the worst of the now four-year war in syria. geopolitically, ankara has pushed the united states as hard as any to make good on an effort to remove bashar al-assad from power; while the us has unsuccessfully tried to enlist the turks in the fight against isis. turkey wants the war to go away, while not becoming a direct target of an increasingly dangerous and powerful isis.
>
> turkey has failed on both fronts. some 2 million syrian refugees have made their way into turkey, along with an estimated several thousand foreign fighters from the war. turkey is absorbing the overwhelming majority of the fallout. an estimated 95% of resources to ensure basic needs for the largely well organized refugee camps is borne by the turkish government. and the country is now taking physical casualties as well, with growing tensions across the border with isis fighters, dozens of incidents of cross-border fire, and one with a turkish soldier being killed (apparently after refusing isis forces to bring a wounded soldier over the border for medical treatment). then there's the recent islamic state bombing that killed 32 and injured over 100 in a kurdish student gathering in the town of suruc.
>
> this last event was a watershed moment for the turkish government, leading to anti-government protests across the country. president recep tayyip erdogan blocked twitter shortly afterwards, in the hope of preventing images of the suruc bombing and related commentary from circulating. which in turn only fed growing domestic opposition focused on the failure of the turkish government to prevent the attack.
>
> on the heels of poor performance in his country's parliamentary elections, erdogan recognized that his regional strategy was failing and decided to start direct military activities against isis (with an initial bombing campaign in syria beginning last week) and to coordinate efforts across the border with the united states, including opening turkish airspace and the incirlik airbase to american bombers. shortly after, the turkish government carried out bombing operations against kurds in iraq that they claimed were also supporting terrorism. and simultaneously ordered anti-terror raids within

turkey — against isis supporters, members of the kurdistan workers' party (pkk), and the anti-erdogan gulen movement — arresting some 300 turkish citizens.
>
> i'd call it less of a shift from erdogan to support nato, but rather an expansion of the fight from a besieged turkish government to include… just about everybody. that's a plus for the americans trying to contain isis. it's also a longer lease on life for the assad regime, which is now fighting in a war that's effectively stalemated.
>
> a few significant challenges for turkey going forward. erdogan's willingness to tolerate isis sympathizers over the course of the syria war will make it dramatically harder for the turkish government to now root them out now. turkey's sudden decision to take the fight to isis will likely lead to significant successful isis attacks within turkey, the biggest shift in terrorist vulnerability for a major emerging market since the beginning of the arab spring. that in turn will put a damper on investor sentiment for the country, and make the political process in turkey that much more challenging.
>
> there's also the open question of turkey's government itself, for which the ak party had been trying to pull together a coalition to rule the country. cooperation with the pro-kurdish hdp is nearly impossible in the present political and security environment. an alliance with the republican people's party (chp) is possible — and there's plenty of public demand for a national unity government given growing dissatisfaction with erdogan. but syria policy has been a key stumbling block with the chp; and the party's been particularly vocal in its criticism following the suruc bombing. the chp is considerably less interested in taking responsibility in a security environment that could prove ungovernable. and erdogan himself would rather go for early elections, as he hopes to use the nationalist backlash to secure an ak party majority (which prime minister ahmet davutoglu opposes... as he hopes to curb erdogan's influence). so plenty of internal fighting within the ak party, and within turkey more broadly, going forward.
>
> iran
>
> on balance, a good week for the obama administration and secretary of state john kerry in selling the iran deal. the biggest news was a fiery session in congress with republican senators lining up to take shots at the administration, and two confidential "side deals" that the white house denied, acknowledged, and then mostly didn't acknowledge, regarding access to previous military research conducted by iran.
>
> as i wrote last week, many technical aspects of the deal are problematic and will prove more difficult to implement than presently expressed. the iaea documents are a piece of this, albeit on a side issue — the us always saw iranian admission of previous military research (for the weaponization of nuclear technology) as critical; while the iranian regime denied it ever happened. pursuing a separate "deal" on skirting that admission and providing access to military sites was as much a domestic smokescreen for the iranian regime (which had promised its own citizens repeatedly there were no such programs) as it was necessary to obscure a us climbdown on the terms of access to allow a definitive iaea report to be written. does it undermine the terms of the deal? yes. does it critically undermine the agreement? no.
>
> but what's very obvious is that, like the iaea issue, the details we're discussing on whether or not the nuclear terms of the deal are acceptable are extremely technical. and it's clear from testimony that there's not a single member of congress that's actually read the 150-page document, never mind truly digested it and understood it. whereas kerry has basically lived and breathed the negotiations for the past several months of his life. his fluency in talking about the deal and parrying mostly uneducated if oppositional lines of questioning is a distinct advantage, and will help to ensure that the democrats stay behind the administration in the coming vote. so i really don't see any way for a veto-proof majority to emerge in congress.

>
> the israel angle is interesting. us secretary of defense ash carter got singleminded opposition from every israeli official he met with during his trip to the region last week. the israeli military brass was given clear instructions from prime minister benjamin netanyahu not to discuss any potential benefits for israel in return for accepting a deal. netanyahu isn't interested in cutting a deal… he believes there's a chance of overriding the vote in congress and wants to focus all of his government's efforts on that.
>
> but netanyahu's position is far from consensus. one senior israeli official told me it is obvious that, long term, iran would be a more natural partner for israel than the gulf states; and that, as problematic as the iran deal is for israel in the near term, senior israeli diplomats well understand that, long term, it would facilitate an improved israeli geopolitical context. he also told me that he could never say this publicly, lest his next post be in abuja (i told him i heard it was nice in the summer).
>
> carter's trip to the gulf was considerably more successful. the sunni monarchies now range from active support for the agreement (oman, qatar) to toleration and willingness to work out a compromise, with improved security benefits from the united states. i had a chance to see secretary kerry on friday, and two weeks after signing the deal he made it clear that he saw the trajectory with america's gulf allies as significantly more positive (while he hedged on russia and china).
>
> there's no diplomatic breakthrough soon with tehran: the white house has to get through congress, and supreme leader ayatollah ali khamenei has plenty of reason to continue taking an ideological hard line with the "great satan." but we'll see significant us efforts to better coordinate policy with tehran on both syria and iraq, at least some of which should become public before the deal is formally approved in washington.
>
> afghanistan
>
> believe it or not, good news from a most unlikely corner: the afghan government is holding together. president ashraf ghani has far more international credibility than any other figure in the country; and he's used it to keep humanitarian assistance flowing and to gain commitments from the americans to maintain military capabilities, support and, critically, training in his country.
>
> almost everyone i've spoken with who has engaged with the afghan government in the past months — american, european, pakistani, or chinese — talks about how much more capable and honest this government is, compared to working with the cronyism that was present under the previous regime of hamid karzai. corruption/patronage remains rife in the afghan bureaucracy, but ghani himself is a technocrat and so are his appointees, which has facilitated significant goodwill for a country whose gdp is 75% comprised of international aid.
>
> the taliban are a bigger problem. while they've had limited success in holding territory in the south, the fighting has expanded... and afghan forces have taken some 50% more casualties to date this year than in 2014. still, there's growing hope in the prospects of successful negotiations with the taliban, facilitated by the chinese government. there's a strong recognition on the part of all the participants that the taliban will remain a significant political force both inside the country and in pakistan for the foreseeable future, and so there's a need to engage and create stability (the sort of recognition that by no means exists among the international community vis-à-vis syria's assad...). all of which means at least a decent chance of a ceasefire at the end of this month.
>
> afghanistan remains very far from being sustainable — politically, economically, or from a security perspective. but in a region where failed states are expanding, terrorism is gaining steam, and geopolitical fragmentation is a growing reality, a little stability in afghanistan is welcome.
>

> us elections
>
> we're still half a year from primaries and 15 months (!) from general elections… i've really no intention of regularly writing about the us presidential election at this point. but the headlines being generated by the early fireworks, especially of the present republican front-running donald trump, have generated so many inbound questions that i feel i have to write a few words. so here goes.
>
> stronger anti-establishment sentiment is the most important new factor. since the last election, the us economy has picked up significantly… but american views of their political institutions, and particularly of the democratic and republican parties and congress, have deteriorated to record lows. obama is at a reasonable 50% approval rating right now; actually better than average in the context of recent presidents after 6 1/2 years of two terms. but support for congress is in single digits, and voters are loathe to affiliate with either the republican or democratic party.
>
> that means donald trump leading the pack in the republican party and, when the media and public lose interest in him (and as other candidates gain name recognition), a bump for whoever looks strongest among the self-identified outsiders: either chris christie, ted cruz, or rand paul. it also means more traction for bernie sanders in the democratic party, who will likely perform far better than anybody thinks… partially picking up anti-establishment sentiment, partially because everyone covering the race wants a race.
>
> but the united states isn't europe. the occupy wall street movement captivated attentions for a short period of time, and then collapsed. so too will trump, sanders, et al. there's plenty of invective being thrown at the establishment of both parties, but not enough for well-organized billion-dollar campaigns with solid media (and, for hillary clinton, critically, social media) support to lose to.
>
> i am hearing from many insiders that vice president joe biden is serious about throwing his hat in the ring. if he does, that creates enormous thunder... for a few months. but ultimately i have a hard time betting on him winning or taking enough support from hillary to give sanders a serious shot. the real issue is whether trump decides to run as an independent. which just as certainly guarantees his loss but would be a tremendous boost to a hillary candidacy. on balance, i don't think that will happen either… because however much continuing the race might be appealling, an independent candidacy is a lost cause. which means it ultimately still comes down to a very serious race between the republican nominee and the (very likely) hillary.
>
> * * *
>
> is it summer yet? for the first time in months, a week without an obvious crisis that had to work its way into eg update coverage. i'm not getting my hopes up yet.
> ian Bremmer
>
>
> Idan
>